

### **AFGHANISTAN (Tier 3)**

The Government of Afghanistan does not fully meet the minimum standards for the elimination of trafficking and is not making significant efforts to do so, even considering the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on its anti-trafficking capacity. During the reporting period there was a government pattern of sexual slavery in government compounds (*bacha bazi*—a practice in which men exploit boys for social and sexual entertainment) and recruitment and use of child soldiers; therefore Afghanistan remained on Tier 3. Despite the lack of significant efforts, the government took some notable steps to address trafficking, including prosecuting and convicting members of the security services for *bacha bazi*, removing some child soldiers from armed forces, and indicting the chief of the Major Crimes Task Force for trafficking crimes. A school headmaster was also indicted in connection with the 2019 Logar case, which included *bacha bazi*, and was the first government employee to be charged in relation to the case. The government increased anti-trafficking trainings for security officials, the judiciary, and prosecutors and finalized a national referral mechanism to increase the identification of trafficking victims and refer them to proper services. However, the government did not investigate or prosecute many high-level security officials or government employees for *bacha bazi*, despite continuing reports of complicity. The government reported limited efforts to address other trafficking crimes that were not *bacha bazi*. An international organization reported that the government or government-affiliated armed groups recruited and used at least 24 children during the reporting year. The government has never prosecuted any military or police officials for recruitment or use of child soldiers. Authorities continued to arrest, detain, penalize, and abuse many trafficking victims, including punishing sex trafficking victims for “moral crimes” and sexually assaulting victims who attempted to report trafficking crimes to law enforcement officials. Due to inadequate victim protection, some NGOs would not assist trafficking victims in reporting their traffickers to law enforcement.

### **PRIORITIZED RECOMMENDATIONS:**

Continue to prioritize criminal investigations and prosecutions of suspected traffickers, including law enforcement and military officials irrespective of rank, and convict and adequately sentence perpetrators. • Cease the unlawful recruitment and use of children by Afghan security forces, including for *bacha bazi*, and

demobilize children from all armed groups with adequate protection and reintegration support. • Increase proactive identification of trafficking victims and ensure victims are protected during interactions with law enforcement. • Empower the National Child Protection Committee to identify and suggest the removal of public servants implicated in perpetrating or facilitating *bacha bazi*. • Cease penalization and abuse of victims for unlawful acts traffickers forced them to commit, including “moral crimes.” • Train justice system officials on the anti-trafficking provisions in the penal code and the prohibition against mediation in sex trafficking cases per the 2009 Elimination of Violence Against Women Act. • Cease support to nonstate armed groups that recruit and use child soldiers. • Provide clear guidance to security personnel on identification and protection of child trafficking victims and train them on it. • Approve, disseminate, and conduct widespread training on the SOPs for victim identification and referral to services. • Strengthen law enforcement’s capacity to address trafficking, including increased training and resources for the Ministry of Interior’s provincial anti-trafficking/smuggling units. • Dedicate resources for trafficking victim shelters and services, including for male victims. • Amend Chapter 5 of the penal code to increase the penalties for *bacha bazi* in line with penalties prescribed for other forms of trafficking. • Raise awareness of trafficking at the local level, including its definition, law enforcement and social service resources available, and community prevention efforts. • Support the High Commission for Combating Trafficking in Persons and its data collection efforts.

## PROSECUTION

The government increased law enforcement efforts, including on *bacha bazi*; however, official complicity in the recruitment and use of child soldiers continued with impunity. The 2017 Law to Combat Crimes of Trafficking in Persons and Smuggling of Migrants criminalized sex trafficking and labor trafficking, including *bacha bazi*. The law prescribed penalties between five and eight years’ imprisonment. These penalties were sufficiently stringent and, with respect to sex trafficking, commensurate with those for other serious crimes. Aggravating factors increased the maximum sentence to between 10 and 15 years’ and the imposition of the death penalty if exploitation for armed fighting resulted in the victim’s death. Article 510 of the 2018 criminal code criminalized sex trafficking and labor trafficking, including *bacha bazi*. Article 511 prescribed penalties of five to 10 years’ imprisonment for trafficking offenses involving adult male victims and 10 to 16 years’ imprisonment if the victim was a woman or child or exploited in *bacha*

*bazi*. These penalties were sufficiently stringent and, with respect to sex trafficking, commensurate with those for other serious crimes, such as rape. Article 512 outlined aggravating factors and increased penalties to 16 to 20 years' imprisonment for sex trafficking or forced armed fighting and between 20 to 30 years' imprisonment if the victim who was forced to fight died while subjected to trafficking. While the 2018 penal code also specifically criminalized more crimes related to *bacha bazi*, some of which would constitute trafficking offenses, it also prescribed lower penalties for certain acts constituting *bacha bazi* than those prescribed under Article 510. Most of these penalties were not sufficiently stringent, nor commensurate with the penalties prescribed for other serious crimes, such as rape. The government also used the 2009 Law on the Elimination of Violence Against Women (EVAW) to prosecute and convict sex traffickers.

Despite growing political will to hold perpetrators accountable, the government's lack of resources and a deteriorating security situation diminished enforcement of anti-trafficking laws. The judiciary remained underfunded, understaffed, undertrained, and in some cases ineffective, and judicial officials were often intimidated by perpetrators or corrupt officials. In urban areas, if judges or prosecutors did not assess that a clearly defined legal statute applied or they were unaware of the statutory law, then they enforced customary law, which often resulted in outcomes that discriminated against women. While the EVAW law expressly prohibited mediation, and other Afghan laws neither permitted nor prescribed mediation in criminal cases, police and judges often referred trafficking victims to mediation. In some areas, anti-government forces such as the Taliban instituted their own customary justice practices, including for trafficking victims. In some cases involving sexual abuse, the Taliban executed both perpetrator and victim.

As in the previous year, ministries provided limited data, which made it difficult to compare to previous years. The Ministry of Interior (MOI) reported referring 237 cases of *bacha bazi* to the Attorney General's Office (AGO), with 185 of these cases under police investigation at the end of the reporting period, compared with the investigation of 16 suspects in 14 trafficking-related cases in 2019. The government separately reported additional statistics on combined human trafficking and migrant smuggling efforts. It reported investigating 50 suspects and initiating prosecution of an unknown number of cases. It was unclear how many of these investigations and prosecutions were for human trafficking.

In addition, the MOI's Major Crimes Task Force chief Abdul Razaq Ahmadzai was indicted for trafficking offenses; he is the highest-ranking government official to face such charges. The AGO initiated prosecution of 19 suspects in four *bacha bazi*-related cases. In one of the cases, the government charged four suspects in connection to a network of child sexual abuse, including *bacha bazi*, uncovered in November 2019 within the Logar public high school system. One of the four suspects was a high school headmaster and the first government employee to face charges of child sexual assault related to the case. The judiciary convicted seven Afghan National Police (ANP) officers of *bacha bazi*, murder, rape, assault, and sodomy in one case and separately, two Afghan National Army (ANA) officers for *bacha bazi* during the reporting period. These were the first known cases where the government charged uniformed police officers directly with *bacha bazi* and did not solely charge the trafficker with the related crimes. Courts sentenced one ANP officer to death, two received 30-year prison sentences, and the remaining four received 24-year prison sentences. Courts sentenced the two ANA officers to 18 months' imprisonment. In addition, the court convicted nine individuals of child sexual assault for their involvement in the 2019 Logar *bacha bazi* case involving the sexual abuse of 165 male students. Courts sentenced the perpetrators to between five and 22 years' imprisonment. According to the High Commission, at the close of the reporting period, 47 trafficking cases were currently with the primary court, 35 with the appellate court, and 76 with the supreme court. Thirteen cases involving *bacha bazi* were with the primary court and eight with the appellate court. Courts convicted seven traffickers under the anti-trafficking and EVAW laws in the previous reporting period.

While the government took action to investigate, prosecute, and convict government officials allegedly complicit in *bacha bazi* in the above cases, disregard for the rule of law and official complicity in trafficking, especially *bacha bazi*, remained widespread. Afghan security forces, in particular the ANP and Afghan Local Police (ALP—disbanded in late 2020), continued to recruit boys for *bacha bazi*. Local authorities acknowledged that some police, especially checkpoint commanders, recruited boys for sex trafficking in *bacha bazi*. An international organization reported Afghan security forces or pro-government militias perpetrated seven cases of sexual violence and rape, including possible *bacha bazi*, during the reporting period; this included three cases by the ANP, one by the ALP, one by the ANA, one by the Afghan National Army-Territorial Force, and one by a pro-government armed group. The government reported prosecution

and conviction of the officials involved in one ANP and one ANA case and is investigating the remaining cases. Additionally, the international organization noted the reported cases did not reflect the full extent of the problem given the obstacles victims and witnesses faced in reporting, as well as the organization's challenges in verifying these cases due to the sensitivities around victim stigmatization and gender and concerns for victim and witness protection. Some Afghan security forces and pro-government militias—some of whom may have received direct financial support from the government—recruited boys specifically for use in *bacha bazi*. In some instances, ANA officials reportedly used promises of food and money to entice boys into *bacha bazi*.

Afghan security forces, including the ANA, ANP, and the now-disbanded ALP, continued to recruit and use children in combat and non-combat roles. MOI and the Ministry of Defense (MOD) continued to rely on past directives they had issued to prevent the recruitment and sexual abuse of children. An international organization stated the government made notable progress on combating the recruitment and use of child soldiers through its Child Protection Units (CPUs) in ANP recruitment centers. Beginning in 2018 the government established one CPU in each of the 34 provinces; all 34 remained active during the reporting period. According to the Office of the President, MOD prevented the recruitment of more than 5,050 children into Afghan national defense and security forces during the year. However, in 2020, an international organization reported the ALP and pro-government armed groups jointly recruited and used eight children, the ANP recruited and used five, the Afghan National Army-Territorial Force recruited and used four, and pro-government armed groups recruited and used seven children. This is similar to previous years, though experts stressed recruitment and use of child soldiers remained underreported, often due to safety concerns. The government has never prosecuted any military or police official for recruitment or use of child soldiers, though it did investigate some claims. Some officials accepted bribes to produce identity documents for boys stating they were at least 18 years old. In addition, media reported the ANP and pro-government militias forced some civilians to defend isolated outposts in the north of country against insurgents; untrained civilians arrived at these locations often through the fraudulent promise of work and were left isolated with limited supplies for months at a time.

Widespread official complicity in human trafficking continued outside of the Afghan security forces, often with impunity. Observers noted perpetrators of *bacha*

*bazi* often paid bribes to, or had relationships with, law enforcement, prosecutors, or judges who protected them from prosecution. In the past, a public health official who conducted forensic exams for criminal cases reported state prosecutors pressured him not to report confirmed evidence of abuse, including in cases of *bacha bazi*. In 2019, activists spent six months investigating and interviewing hundreds of boys ages 14-20 in Logar province across three high schools and found evidence that at least 165 were sexually abused by teachers, principals, vice principals, fellow students, and at least one local law enforcement official. Some youth were required to have sex in exchange for passing grades. Officials dismissed one school manager accused of *bacha bazi* from his job but later gave him a job at Logar's provincial Education Department. After an international outcry, several government bodies—including the AGO, Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission (AIHRC), Ministry of Education (MOE), Parliament, and the Logar provincial government—investigated the allegations, but the quality and thoroughness of the investigations varied, and the results were inconsistent with victim reports. The AGO investigation identified 20 suspected perpetrators, 10 of whom the government had arrested by the end of the reporting period, including a school headmaster, resulting in nine convictions. Separately, in previous reporting periods, female sex trafficking victims alleged prosecutors and judicial officials sought sexual favors in exchange for continuing investigations and prosecutions of their cases.

Law enforcement and judicial officials continued to have a limited understanding of trafficking. While the 2017 law used separate terms and definitions for trafficking and smuggling, Dari, the most widely spoken language in Afghanistan, historically used the same word for human trafficking and migrant smuggling, and officials conflated the two crimes. The High Commission developed and implemented awareness classes for an unknown number of officials and the government, with funding from a foreign government, also developed its first Countering Trafficking in Persons and Smuggling of Migrants Training Manual with the help of an international organization. The National Directorate of Security (NDS) Human Rights Department conducted 89 seminars on child protection and the prevention of trafficking, including *bacha bazi*, in 2020. The President directed the government to improve the quantity and quality of trafficking prosecutions, which subsequently led government legal experts to provide a three-day training on trafficking laws to provincial judicial officials. Separately and in partnership with a foreign government, the AGO, Supreme Court, and the Ministry of Justice (MOJ)

provided training to approximately 300 prosecutors, judges, and legal aid attorneys on sections of the Afghan penal code covering *bacha bazi* from October 2019 through November 2020. MOD's Human Rights Unit provided awareness training for 2,925 officers, noncommissioned officers, and soldiers on human rights, the Child Rights Protection Law, and the prevention of child soldiers. MOI continued to operate dedicated trafficking/smuggling units in each of the 34 provinces and in Kabul, with two officers in each province. NDS, the Afghan Border Police (ABP), and a Kabul-based INTERPOL unit also had mandates to address human trafficking. The agencies did not have a clear delineation of responsibilities, and therefore, NDS investigated most human trafficking cases. While ABP was the best positioned to identify and investigate trafficking at the borders and some of its officers received anti-trafficking training during the reporting period, many officials still lacked anti-trafficking training and the force as a whole lacked the resources to identify and investigate trafficking. Officials acknowledged personnel, resources, and knowledge of trafficking remained inadequate across all units. Law enforcement lacked cooperation with neighboring countries, which impeded investigation of transnational trafficking cases.

## **PROTECTION**

The government maintained inadequate protection efforts and continued to penalize and abuse trafficking victims. The High Commission reported identifying 550 potential trafficking victims in 2020, compared with 493 in 2019, although NGOs continued to express concern about the validity of the figures. The government separately reported it identified 20 children as child soldiers in the military and referred them to child protection centers, as well as 35 children in civilian security forces in Uruzgan province who were returned to their families. The MOJ approved the national referral mechanism (NRM), drafted in previous reporting periods in partnership with a foreign government. While the NRM was designed to help officials identify and refer victims of trafficking to protective services, the government did not report to what extent, if at all, it was utilized during the reporting period. An international organization continued to train officials on a victim identification manual. Afghans continued to both voluntarily return and be deported from Iran and Pakistan, and traffickers abroad reportedly forced some Afghans into labor prior to their return or deportation. At the border, government agencies such as the Department of Refugees and Returnees, ABP, NDS, and AIHRC engaged in some screening of Afghan returnees for migrant smuggling and referred some Afghans to care. It was unclear if officials also

screened returnees for trafficking or referred suspected trafficking victims to services.

Police did not consistently refer trafficking victims to shelters, and the dearth of shelters impeded victim protection. International donors and NGOs provided nearly all victim care. NGOs operated, and international donors funded, approximately 27 women's shelters in 20 provinces that provided protection, legal, medical, and social services to female victims of violence, including trafficking. The shelters did not report how many trafficking victims they assisted. NGOs operated two shelters for boy victims of crime that could assist male trafficking victims younger than 18. No government shelters could accommodate adult male trafficking victims. At times, the government placed child trafficking victims in orphanages, and some orphanages subjected children to trafficking. Additionally, in the absence of sufficient shelters for boys, authorities detained abused boys and placed them in juvenile rehabilitation centers. Authorities sometimes placed male and female victims in prison if they could not accommodate them in shelters. The High Commission reported that during 2020, 600 victims of trafficking or smuggling of migrants received a mix of medical, psychological, and educational care, and family reunification. In theory, the Ministry of Women's Affairs (MOWA) would provide services for female trafficking victims and the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs (MOLSA) would provide services for boy trafficking victims; in practice, neither MOWA nor MOLSA offered victims much support. Family guidance centers in 19 provinces provided non-residential legal and social services for women and children, including trafficking victims. The government employed 250 social workers, including those specifically trained to assist child victims of crime. The Child Protection Action Network (CPAN), a conglomerate of NGOs, civil society, and government entities overseen by MOLSA, was active in 170 districts and could provide shelter and some services to child victims of crime. CPAN was the only entity that addressed child protection issues, including child trafficking, outside of Kabul.

In cases of parental complicity in child trafficking, authorities often returned children to their parents without sufficient efforts to ensure parents would not subject their children to trafficking again. MOI reported it returned 35 children removed from child soldiering to their families in Uruzgan province; it did not report if it had determined if the child's home was safe for their return. The government took some steps to enhance child protection mechanisms, which could assist child trafficking victims. In the previous reporting period, the President



ordered several ministries to create a National Child Protection Committee to address *bacha bazi* with representatives from AGO, AIHRC, MOE and other bodies; the government later decided the CPAN and High Commission were effective enough without the parallel body.

Government investigators did not always interview suspected victims of trafficking and in some cases did not provide adequate support or security for victims to safely speak about what had happened. Victims, especially of *bacha bazi*, feared abuse and penalization by law enforcement, threats of retaliation from traffickers and one's community, and even for their lives. The stigma associated with trafficking also prevented the vast majority of trafficking victims from bringing cases forward to law enforcement or seeking care. Multiple *bacha bazi* victims reported police sexually abused them when they tried to report their exploitation and then treated them as criminals, sometimes detaining and penalizing them. In the previous reporting period, in two high-profile investigations into sex trafficking by a high-ranking sports official and Afghan school teachers and police in Logar state, victims reported widespread retaliation from alleged perpetrators and, due to a lack of victim protection, fled Afghanistan. Also reported in the past, due to a lack of victim protection, family members and the Taliban murdered at least eight child sex trafficking victims, including some as young as 13 years old, for dishonor. Observers reported they did not recommend trafficking victims report their traffickers to law enforcement or participate in trials due to the significant risk of threats and reprisals and complete lack of protection. Afghan law allowed prosecutors to seek restitution for trafficking victims, but not all did so, and the ones who did were often unsuccessful. There were no reports that any trafficking victims received restitution during the reporting period. Foreign victims had the same limited access to services as Afghan victims, and Afghan law allowed foreign victims to remain in Afghanistan for at least six months. The High Commission did not report if it identified any foreign victims.

The penal code explicitly prohibited penalization of trafficking victims for crimes their traffickers compelled them to commit. Nevertheless, the formal justice system and informal, customary justice administered in rural areas and by the Taliban all routinely arrested, imprisoned, and penalized adult and child trafficking victims. Some female trafficking victims could not access the formal justice system because cultural norms precluded their engagement with male judicial officials. When female sex trafficking victims did access formal justice, officials penalized some of them for "moral crimes" such as sex outside of marriage. In rural areas, the lack of

access to the formal justice system also disproportionately affected women. Male community leaders in some cases settled both criminal and civil disputes and penalized female sex trafficking victims for “moral crimes.” Through its customary justice practices, the Taliban detained and forced into labor some child and adult sex trafficking victims charged with “moral crimes.” Authorities equally penalized male sex trafficking victims. Authorities prosecuted *bacha bazi* victims as equally responsible “criminals” as their adult traffickers. Authorities remanded boy sex trafficking victims to Juvenile Rehabilitation Centers (JRCs) on criminal charges and detained them for several years. Multiple organizations reported JRCs lacked adequate food and education and reported allegations of sexual violence, including against child sex trafficking victims and child soldiers. JRC authorities reportedly presumed detained children to be guilty and did not provide them with knowledge of the charges against them or access to lawyers. Officials sometimes prosecuted victims for possessing forged identity documents. Following their interception by government forces, all child soldiers from militia groups are initially placed into an NDS detention facility and are sometimes transferred to juvenile JRCs and later to a shelter for child victims of trafficking, conflict-related violence, abandonment, and other issues, run by MOLSA and located in Kabul. An estimated 125 children were held at the NDS detention facility during 2020, 30 were held at the shelter, and there was no reliable estimate of how many children were held in JRCs. The government operated a total of five shelters for children, with two more under construction. The government arrested, detained, and prosecuted for terrorism-related crimes children younger than 12 years old that nonstate armed groups had forcibly recruited.

## **PREVENTION**

The government made increased efforts to adopt anti-trafficking prevention plans, but the government’s implementation remained inadequate to prevent trafficking. The High Commission, the government’s autonomous inter-ministerial anti-trafficking committee under the MOJ, met twice in 2020, and its Technical Committee met more than a dozen times. The High Commission’s working-level committee lacked resources and influence over member ministries and relied heavily on NGOs to coordinate and fund meetings. The High Commission formally petitioned the government for a budget, increased staff, greater cooperation among ministerial-level members, and additional capacity building, but it did not receive any of these requests during the reporting period. Provincial-level anti-trafficking commissions operated in 16 provinces, chaired by the

respective provincial governors, with plans for commissions to operate in all 34 provinces. There were no reports as to how frequently these commissions met or how effective they were. In addition, the office of the President reported the presence of anti-trafficking focal points in 33 provinces. The government had an anti-trafficking national action plan (NAP) that covered 2018-2021. During the reporting period, the Office of the National Security Council led the development of a new NAP which outlined specific actions for MOI, MOD, MOJ, and other ministries. The Cabinet approved the NAP, but it awaited final approval by the President at the end of the reporting period. The MOJ continued to refuse to share data with an international organization to publish an annual national report on human trafficking. The High Commission, in partnership with international organizations and NGOs, continued public awareness programs that reached more than 8,000 citizens, government officials, and security force personnel. Separately, several agencies also conducted anti-trafficking awareness sessions for vulnerable groups: during 2020, Ministry of Public Health awareness programs reached more than 13,500 Afghans repatriated from Iran, Pakistan, Greece, Turkey, and European countries; MOWA's trafficking awareness programs reached more than 100 government and NGO officials, as well as district and village elders across Kabul.

MOE introduced a policy on the prevention of sexual harassment and abuse in schools in response to the Logar case in 2019. MOE officials worked with Logar legal advocates to reform school regulations and curriculum, emphasizing the safety of children and the need for awareness of anti-trafficking laws, such as those outlawing *bacha bazi*, and providing protections for survivors. Legal advocates also worked with Ministry of Higher Education officials to develop and implement guidelines and protocols to address trafficking, sexual harassment, and abuse on university campuses. MOD, MOI, and NDS completed their common child protection policy for their forces in the field and began disseminating it among rank-and-file personnel. The government had some existing migrant labor agreements with Gulf countries but did not implement them during the reporting period. The AGO noted that it did not receive any child labor cases during the reporting period, neither from other ministries nor NGOs. Given the lack of reported cases, experts assessed there was not a functioning referral mechanism between criminal authorities and social services.

MOI operated CPUs in all 34 provinces to prevent the recruitment of children into the ANP. According to an international organization, these units prevented 187

underage applicants from joining the ANP. MOD reported it prevented the recruitment of 90 children during 2020. Additionally, an MOD review of former ALP personnel slated for MOD service triggered by the forces' dissolution revealed 131 boys, who were refused enlistment. For the ANP, some NGOs reported CPUs were not sufficiently equipped, staffed, or trained to provide adequate oversight. The government did not have a sufficient referral pathway for children identified by CPUs and prevented from joining the security forces to provide shelter, services, and family reintegration; thus, the children remained highly vulnerable to recruitment and use, as well as other forms of forced labor. The government did not make efforts to reduce the demand for commercial sex acts or provide anti-trafficking training for diplomatic personnel.

## **TRAFFICKING PROFILE**

As reported over the past five years, human traffickers exploit domestic and foreign victims in Afghanistan, and traffickers exploit victims from Afghanistan abroad. Internal trafficking is more prevalent than transnational trafficking. Traffickers exploit men, women, and children in bonded labor, a form of forced labor by which traffickers offer loans and manipulate the debts to coerce workers into continued employment. The pandemic increased the risk of exploitation by traffickers, especially bonded labor, as individuals took out loans to cover expenses. Traffickers compel entire families to work in bonded labor in the brickmaking industry, predominately in eastern Afghanistan, and in carpet weaving countrywide. Most Afghan trafficking victims are children forced to work in carpet making, brick kilns, domestic servitude, commercial sex, begging, poppy cultivation and harvesting, salt mining, transnational drug smuggling, and truck driving. Some Afghan families force their children into labor with physical violence or knowingly sell their children into sex trafficking, including *bacha bazi*. Opium-farming families sometimes sell their children to settle debts with opium traffickers, and some drug-addicted parents subject their children to sex trafficking or force them into labor, including begging. Some orphanages run by NGOs and overseen by the government subjected children to trafficking. During the previous reporting period, multiple former government officials alleged high-level officials forced women to have sex in exchange for jobs and promotions. Victims alleged some law enforcement and judiciary officials requested sexual favors in exchange for pursuing cases. In 2019, 165 boys in Logar province reported widespread sexual abuse by government teachers, principals, and local law enforcement, including requiring children to have sex in exchange for passing grades and

subjecting boys to sex trafficking in *bacha bazi*. Some boys who reported sexual abuse and sex trafficking to police reported police officers then raped them.

Afghan security forces and nonstate armed groups continue to unlawfully recruit and use children in combat and non-combat roles. Insurgent groups, including the Taliban and the Islamic State in Khorasan Province, use children in direct hostilities, to plant and detonate improvised explosive devices (IEDs), carry weapons, spy, and guard bases. The Taliban recruits child soldiers from its madrassas in Afghanistan and Pakistan that provide military training and religious indoctrination, and it sometimes provides families cash payments or protection in exchange for sending their children to these schools. Armed groups target children from impoverished and rural areas, particularly those under Taliban control. The Taliban abducts and forces adult women into labor. The Taliban maintains illegal detention facilities in which it forces detainees, including child and adult sex trafficking victims charged with “moral crimes,” into labor. ANA, ANP, and ALP use children in combat and non-combat roles, including to carry weapons and as personal servants, support staff, bodyguards, and sex slaves in *bacha bazi*. Pro-government militias that may receive direct financial support from the government recruited and used child soldiers, primarily in support roles and for *bacha bazi*.

Traffickers’, including government and military officials’, exploitation of children as young as 9 in *bacha bazi* remained pervasive nationwide. In the northern provinces, many *bacha bazi* traffickers were community elders or private citizens. In southern provinces, by contrast, *bacha bazi* perpetrators were more commonly police, military, and local government officials. Local authorities overwhelmingly acknowledged that many police, especially checkpoint commanders, recruited boys for sex trafficking in *bacha bazi* nationwide but especially in Kandahar province. *Bacha bazi* survivors reported to NGOs an “overwhelming understanding that *bacha bazi* is committed by the powerful,” including military commanders and community leaders. International organizations reported cases of *bacha bazi* by nearly all groups. ALP, ANA, and pro-government militias reportedly recruited some children specifically for *bacha bazi*. Perpetrators of *bacha bazi* sometimes offer bribes or use relationships with law enforcement, prosecutors, and judges to evade punishment.

In 2020, Afghanistan received approximately 865,793 returns of undocumented Afghan migrant workers from Iran and Pakistan. Traffickers specifically targeted returnees for forced labor in agriculture, brick kilns, and carpet weaving. In 2019,

Turkey deported nearly 24,000 Afghans; while most were migrant smuggling victims, traffickers had previously forced some to work in Iran or to fight in militias in Syria. Traffickers targeted Afghans residing in Pakistan – including 1.4 million Afghan Proof of Registration (POR) card holders, 880,000 Afghan Citizen Card (ACC) holders, and an estimated 300,000 to 500,000 undocumented Afghans. The Pakistani government allowed the ACC and POR registration to expire, further increasing Afghans' vulnerability to exploitation. International organizations documented cases of IDPs selling their children to local shopkeepers in servitude to repay debts. Some traffickers targeted indebted IDPs for forced labor and sex trafficking.

Afghan men, women, and children pay intermediaries to assist them in finding employment abroad, primarily in Iran, Pakistan, and Europe; some intermediaries and employers force Afghans into labor or sex trafficking. Some Afghan women and girls who are sold to husbands in Afghanistan, India, Iran, and Pakistan are exploited in sex trafficking and domestic servitude by their new husbands. According to an international organization, during the reporting period, the economic effects of pandemic as well as other conditions, such as drought in several provinces, exacerbated the problem of families selling girls into marriage. Some Afghan parents forcibly send boys to Iran to work to pay for their dowry in an arranged marriage. Afghan boys and men are subjected to forced labor and debt bondage in agriculture and construction, primarily in Iran, Pakistan, Greece, Turkey, and the Gulf states. Traffickers in Iran, including Iranian criminal groups, exploit Afghan children in forced labor as beggars and street vendors and forced criminality, including drug trafficking and smuggling of fuel and tobacco. Iranian police sometimes detain, torture, and extort Afghan child trafficking victims before deportation. The Iranian government and the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps continue to force and coerce Afghan migrants, including children as young as 12 years old, to fight in Iranian-led-and-funded Shia militias deployed to Syria by threatening them with arrest and deportation to Afghanistan. Trafficking networks smuggle Afghan nationals living in Iran to Europe and subject them to sex trafficking and force them to work in restaurants to pay off debts incurred by smuggling fees. Some Afghan traffickers have subjected Afghan boys to *bacha bazi* in Germany, Hungary, Macedonia, and Serbia. Traffickers have subjected women and girls from China, Iran, Pakistan, Philippines, Sri Lanka, and Tajikistan to sex trafficking in Afghanistan. Under the pretense of high-paying employment

opportunities, some labor recruiting agencies lure foreign workers to Afghanistan from South and Central Asia and subject them to forced labor after arrival.